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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Karla Ice, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Louise Duvall
Urbandale, Iowa
9-18-2010**

Louise Duvall: This is Louise Duvall and I am interviewing Karla Ice, Mrs. Karla Ice, who is from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This interview is taking place in Urbandale, Iowa and the date is September 18, 2010 and the time is approximately

9:09. My name is Louise Duvall and Mrs. Ice and I really have no relationship other than I have known of her and have met her off and on for several years. The purpose of this interview is part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa, which is an oral history project. Mrs. Ice, we have reviewed the information form and the purpose of the interview. Do we still have your permission to record this interview?

Karla Ice: Yes.

Duvall: We do. Alright.

Ice: And you can call me Karla.

Duvall: May I call you Karla, well thank you very much. Karla, tell me just a little bit of background information about yourself.

Ice: Well, I'm originally from Waukon, Iowa. I graduated from college at UNI in Cedar Falls, with a German Major, English Minor and with that background, went into medical records. (Laughter) Took training in Illinois and worked in hospitals in the Twin Cities for Minneapolis for about 30 years and then moved to Iowa in 1996, after my husband, Jonathan got his Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling and got a job as a Rehab Counselor at that time, later Teacher, with the Iowa Department for the Blind.

Duvall: Alright, I believe that sets the stage. You've already mentioned the kind of work that you did. Did you meet any

blind people or know any blind people in that work environment?

Ice: There was a blind transcriptionist in the Medical Record Department when I worked at Abbott North Western in Minneapolis.

Duvall: Okay, and so you had had at least a professional relationship with the person who was blind.

Ice: Yes.

Duvall: Since we're interviewing you because of your relationship with Jonathan, and Jonathan is your husband, who is also currently a Rehabilitation Teacher at the Iowa Department for the Blind and is himself legally blind, let me ask you, how did you meet your husband?

Ice: We met in Minneapolis at a singles group at a Lutheran church there in Minneapolis.

Duvall: I see. And was it love at first sight?

Ice: (Laughter) Not exactly. We were friends for a long time and we didn't start dating until about eight or nine years after we met. We're not the kind to rush into things.

Duvall: I see that! So you knew Jonathan socially, through your church and stuff for eight years before you dated or before you married?

Ice: I think we dated for about a year before we got married.

Duvall: So did you know that Jonathan was legally blind when you started to date him?

Ice: Yes, he was very open about the fact that he was legally blind and openly talks to everyone about it. He wasn't at all uncomfortable with the situation.

Duvall: And so if he was comfortable with it...

Ice: That put everybody else at ease, too, I think.

Duvall: Good. It's always interested me was how do you have dates or what kind of dates do you have when the man is blind since I think of the traditional date as him driving up to the door or honking the horn; out you come and away you go to see the movies or something. (Laughter)

Ice: Yeah, well, we both enjoy the outdoors a lot and so a lot of our time together was spent hiking and going for walks and things like that. He's also very interested in classical music, so going to concerts was part of our social life and just fixing meals together. He's a good cook; likes to cook foreign dishes, different kinds of unusual things. And I guess I didn't have expectations of a more traditional dating relationship, so we just pursued our common interests together.

Duvall: And it seems to have worked out.

Ice: Yeah.

Duvall: Are you comfortable being the sighted partner? I mean are you comfortable being responsible for the car and getting from here to there?

Ice: Yes, I believe I am. I think partly because I didn't get married until I was 45. I was used to being single, being independent, seeing about all those kinds of things myself and so it wasn't any shift for me; that was just a continuation of how I operated, I guess.

Duvall: Well, that's good. When did you meet Jonathan's family?

Ice: Oh, that's interesting. I didn't meet them all at once. The first one I met was his sister, Sue, who was going to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa and I had an aunt who lived in Decorah who rented her upstairs to Luther College students and totally by coincidence, his sister Sue ended up living in my aunt's upstairs, having no prior knowledge that there was any connection. So Jon rode with me to Decorah, which was 20 miles from Waukon where my parents lived. So, he would ride down with me, sometimes to visit his sister. And so those long rides we had lots of opportunity for conversation and getting to know each other. So that was his first family member that I met and then after we started dating, I met his Mom. She came to Minneapolis, I think, for a conference of some kind. She was a sociology professor and I met her next. So it was a gradual...I met them kind of one at a time. The first time they ever were all together was at our wedding that I met the whole clan. (Laughter) He's one of six siblings, so it's a large family.

Duvall: Are there other blind people in his family that you know of?

Ice: No, there aren't.

Duvall: So, he was the only one.

Ice: Aha.

Duvall: Well, did you think the family had any kind of expectations of you since you were going to be his partner and taking over responsibility for the care and feeding of?... (Laughter)

Ice: I don't think so. Again, he had been single and independent for a long time and they are a family of, what I guess I would call free spirits. They're all very interesting people; all very different and would expect everyone to just do their own thing.

Duvall: How long have you been married?

Ice: We've been married for 21 years. We were married in 1989.

Duvall: 1989. And at that time you were working in Medical Records program in the hospital at the Twin Cities?

Ice: Yes, exactly.

Duvall: And what was Jonathan doing at the time?

Ice: Let me think, when we met he was a coordinator for senior citizens dining site in North Minneapolis, and then later he had a variety of jobs. Well he went off to Columbia University in New York to pursue a degree as a Physical Therapist, because he had researched as to what occupations would be appropriate for a blind person and had thought that would be a good option for him. It turned out not to work out all that well, so he came back to Minneapolis and got a job in Gelpe's Old World Bakery selling bagels over the counter and it was a wonderful place. It was a kosher bakery. And that's where he was working at the time we started dating.

Duvall: Now you mentioned that Jonathan's first job here in Iowa was as a Rehabilitation Counselor. So, did you know him when he was earning his degree in Rehabilitation Counseling?

Ice: Yes. By that time we were married and he had...He was thinking about going into counseling, so he went and had an informational interview with...and I can't remember the man's name, who was at that time Director of State Services for the Blind.

Duvall: Was that Dick Davis?

Ice: Dick Davis, yes in Minneapolis. And Dick advised him to get a Master's Degree and to get training in the skills of blindness, which Jonathan had never had, because he had enough vision. He used talking books, but that was about the only accommodation that he had learned. So, he went to Blind INC. in Minneapolis and started learning using sleep

shades, learning Braille, learning to travel with a white cane, learning computer skills, all of those skills of blindness...Shop; similar to the orientation center at the Iowa Department for the Blind. By that time they had a part-time program at Blind INC., so he was able to participate in that and meantime Gelpe's Bakery had closed and he was working at a food shelf, stocking at a food shelf, which was a morning job and he could go to Blind INC. in the afternoon; or maybe it was vice-versa. Anyway, he was able to work that out with their part-time program. So after he finished that he enrolled for his Master's Degree at Mankato State. There wasn't a program in Minneapolis; it was either St. Cloud or Mankato. He knew his way around Mankato, because he had lived there during his junior high and high school years. His family lived there. His mother was a Sociology professor. His father was the campus pastor for Lutheran Campus Ministry on that campus, so he was familiar with the area. They also had a part-time program that had all of their classes on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays for their Master's program. So, he was down there part of the week; could take a shuttle bus. There was an airport shuttle.

Duvall: Yes?

Ice: That he could use as transportation going back and forth...

Duvall: So he could come home for the rest of the week?

Ice: So he could come home for the rest of the week. One of the professors told him about a program in Mississippi

during the summer, aimed specifically at Rehab Counseling for the blind, because the program in Mankato was broad rehabilitation of people with all sorts of disabilities and very little, if any direct training with working with blind people. So, he applied for that. There were scholarships available. He got a full scholarship to spend the summer in Mississippi doing blindness specific rehab.

Duvall: This was while you were married, so he was leaving you behind.

Ice: Aha. Well, like I said I'd been single for 45 years. I was used to being independent, so that was really no problem. And then as part of that program, you had an internship. He needed to do a two-week internship somewhere. He knew he would be doing an internship in Minnesota as part of the Mankato program, so this was an opportunity to check out a different location. If we moved, I wanted to be within a reasonable distance of my parents, who were elderly at that time, so Iowa looked like a good option. So, he asked the people at the program in Mississippi if it was possible to do an internship in Iowa and they said, well, they'd never done that but they would check into it. And so it worked out. He spent two weeks there and then went back to Minnesota to finish the program there, do an internship in Rochester with a Rehab Counselor there, and had finished several months of that when he got a call from Iowa, saying, "We have some job openings, would you like to apply?"

Duvall: Aha!

Ice: So, that's the story of how we...

Duvall: Got to Iowa.

Ice: We got back to Iowa, yes.

Duvall: You mentioned that Jonathan did not need or choose to use alternative techniques of blindness until he was considering entering the field professionally.

Ice: Aha.

Duvall: Now, did he include you in that transition too? Did he say, "Now, I'm going to learn to travel with the long, white cane; let's put sleep shades on you and let you try."

15:00

Ice: No, he hasn't put sleep shades on me yet. I thought that it would probably be a good experience for me, but he was telling me about the work he was doing at Blind INC. and he started using the sleep shades and learned immediately how helpful it was to be using a white cane; because then people knew why he was asking the questions he was asking, if he couldn't find something, because otherwise, he didn't look blind and people would wonder. Sometimes he would get very rude responses from people. "Well, its right over there!" "Can't you see it?" (Laughter) So, he learned very quickly the value of the long, white cane and he's been using one ever since.

Duvall: Now, was that the first time he'd ever heard that; that it would be helpful to carry a cane as a symbol of blindness?

Ice: He had had some contact before with the National Federation of the Blind and he had mentioned to me that somebody had suggested to him that he might find a cane helpful, but he didn't see any need for it at that point. I remember making the comment, this is kind of an, "I told you so!" thing that, you know, it might help other people know why you need to ask the questions you need to ask; but, at that point, it didn't click. But once he had the experience of using it, it became apparent to him immediately that it was a helpful thing.

Duvall: Well everybody, as I understand it, has their own "aha!" moment and unless you're ready for it, why...

Ice: And I think it gives him credibility and it gives him insight into the people he works with now; as a Teacher and a Counselor, because a lot of those people have the same reluctance to use that and so he can understand where they're coming from, and he can first-hand point out to them the value of using it.

Duvall: Well, you mentioned that he had had some early contact with the National Federation of the Blind. Can you explain, or not explain, but can you share with me about some of the organizations that Jonathan has been affiliated with that deal with blindness?

Ice: Yes. I think he was originally involved with the Federation in Minnesota when he wanted to go back to school to become a Physical Therapist. He thought he might be able to get some scholarship help, which did not happen, but I think that was kind of what prompted...and then he became active in that affiliate in Minneapolis, was their treasurer for years. When we left they called it the end of the Ice age. (Laughter) Then, he was also involved, in the late '80s, with an organization called Candle in the Window, which is an organization of blind people started by two women in Minneapolis. And rather than being an advocacy organization *per se*, they were more of an introspective organization, looking at what blindness means in the lives of blind people. And their main activity was putting on a conference each year starting out at...most of them were at Wilder Forest close to the Twin Cities at that time. And would pursue a particular aspect of blindness. One time it was leadership skills and blindness. Another time it was relationships; another time it was recreational activities, how does blindness affect the types of recreational activities. I can't remember, but every year they had...

Duvall: Was there anything for a spouse to be involved in?

Ice: One of the workshops that they had was to do with relationships and by that time, I think, we were married. Yeah, we were married by that time, and so spouses, significant others were invited to come to that one. And I believe that I and one other woman were the only two sighted people there out of a group...oh maybe there were 15 people or so there. Wasn't a real large group but it was an interesting experience for me being the minority.

Duvall: Aha!

Ice: And my first time being with that many blind people all in one place at one time. And so the thing that stood out in my mind right away is how chatty they all were. And I thought, well, this makes sense. That's the only way they know who's there is to talk if they can't see...if you're just sitting there and not saying anything. And they were sharing some of their experiences with blindness and with their relationships, how blindness had affected their relationships and there were some very very poignant stories; a woman who had become blind and her husband had divorced her, because he couldn't deal with that situation

Duvall: Couldn't deal with that.

Ice: And another young woman who was very upset with some of her sighted friends that she would rely on for things like grocery shopping and things like that and found out that she couldn't always rely on them or that they were doing it to be nice and not being her friend and things like that...people struggling with those kinds of issues in relationships and it really gave me a lot of insight into what people, not only with blindness but with any disability have to face on a regular basis.

Duvall: And not every relationship was as matter-of-fact about their blindness as yours and Jonathan appear to be.

Ice: Right.

Duvall: Well, how did you feel about being the only, or one of two, sighted people there?

Ice: It was a little bit uncomfortable but as with any situation it becomes more comfortable the more exposure you have to it and so I think I'm...I don't know, one thing I remember being with Jon, when I first knew him I was always pointing out cracks in the sidewalk or things he might trip over trying to be helpful and fortunately, Jon is very outspoken and told me flat out that I was being way too helpful and if he wanted my help he'd ask for it.

Duvall: I see!

Ice: And so that's kind of the attitude I have taken toward being with other blind people. I'm perfectly and quite willing to help them cross a street, help them find something, but I will want them to ask or at least ask them if they want help before I dodge in and just do that...Jon one time...

Sometimes I think every blind person has stories like that they can tell. He was at an airport some place with his white cane and some very helpful person came along, grabbed the end of his cane and started pulling him through the airport, which you know, fortunately for Jon it was okay, because he could see enough to see that he wouldn't, you know, where he was tripping over, but a totally blind person that would be totally...

Duvall: Plus, who wants to put their life in the hands of a stranger. They may not know where you want to go.

Ice: Yeah, right. (Laughter)

Duvall: Well, you mentioned that you observed that blind people were pretty chatty. Have you learned to be chatty yourself?

Ice: Well, I've had to work on that, I guess, because I have to realize that I can't just walk into a room and sit down and expect people to know that I'm there. So, yes, I do have to initiate conversations and announce who I am or so forth; or when we meet somebody say, "Karla Ice here," so they know who's there.

Duvall: Well, have you noticed much difference between, I guess I'll just call it the environment, in Minnesota and in Iowa that has allowed Jonathan to be more or less independent?

Ice: Yeah, one of the first things we noticed was the difference in public transportation. And that's partly just the difference of a large metropolitan area verses a smaller metropolitan area. In Minneapolis we had much better public transportation than we do in Cedar Rapids. So up there he was much more able to be independent in traveling.

Duvall: Taking the bus?

Ice: Taking the buses to wherever he needed to go for music rehearsals or NFB meetings or whatever, getting to work most of that he could do on the bus, whereas in Cedar Rapids the bus service is limited. There's no evening service. There's no weekend service, so it's basically to get

people to and from work, but for any social activities, Jon pretty much has to rely on people for transportation.

Duvall: So, he has to do some coordination of volunteers or hire a driver.

Ice: Aha. He uses a driver for work, yeah. And then for social events, we usually...we share enough of the same interests that usually we're going to the same place, so that all works out.

Duvall: Let's see, you mentioned that the NFB chapter that Jonathan belongs to is actually in Iowa City?

Ice: Correct.

Duvall: And so do you belong...do you go to the meetings and things?

Ice: I provide transportation. We take a car load of people down from Cedar Rapids to Iowa City for the meetings. I'm not myself a member. But they all go out for lunch after the meeting and so I join them for lunch, but I'm not officially a member of the group.

Duvall: That's certainly up to you. That's not a value judgment at all. Are there ways that you can support your husband's advocacy efforts?

Ice: I suppose other than providing transportation to meetings and events, now that I'm retired, my time is a little open. I went with him to the National Federation of the

Blind meeting in Dallas this summer but as far as other than providing transportation, I don't get active in the activities of the group.

Duvall: You aren't a meeting goer.

Ice: No; not as a rule.

Duvall: Well, I was curious about, like, your social life. If the two of you aren't mutually immersed in the blind culture, like the NFB and advocacy activities and things, what kind of social life do you have?

Ice: Jon's interested in classical music, so we go to a lot of musical events. We have season tickets to the symphony in Cedar Rapids, and they have a very fine symphony orchestra there. We also enjoy going to plays, and Jon wasn't always sure that was something he could enjoy, but he uses a monoc, so he gets kind of tunnel vision view of what's going on on stage, but we always sit in the front row and he has come to enjoy really going to plays so that's one of the things we also enjoy doing together. A lot of our events are doing things with people with similar interests, couples that we go to plays with, go to concerts with or go out to eat before or after or outdoor kinds of things; going to the nature center and going for hikes. I had an interest in wild flowers for a long time. Jonathan also got interested and he sees enough that he can spot spots of color when we're walking along. And he's very detail oriented so we're always looking up flowers in the field guide to try to identify what they all are. And when we travel that's one of the things we look for, is hiking, and looking for different kinds of wild flowers.

Duvall: I see! Well, then it certainly sounds like blindness is not the main factor or the controlling factor in what kind of fun and social activities you do. In fact, you've come up with accommodations so that your social life sounds to me like it's pretty broad.

Ice: Right. Probably.

Duvall: Broad and interesting. What kind of things do you do together? I was thinking of, how do you divide your household responsibilities? Have you made any accommodations because of his blindness?

30:00

Ice: Not a whole lot. After we got married, he wanted to try mowing the lawn. One time his mother happened to be visiting and he was wanting... She said, "I don't think we ever had Jonathan mow the lawn." And I said, "Well, we just have to let it get long enough so that he can tell the difference," and he hasn't had any...that hasn't ever been a problem. He's a good cook, when he has time. He's helpful with doing dishes, doing laundry anything like that.

Duvall: Does he have a routine and a regiment about where everything goes and everything in its place that you have to kind of accommodate?

Ice: In a way. I think the biggest thing I can think of in the kitchen, is that never leave a sharp knife lying around. Use it, clean it up and put it away. And, other than that, all the

spices are roughly in alphabetical order; that helps both of us. I know when he was working at Gelpe's Bakery, that was kind of an issue of having to have things in a certain place so he knew where to find things, because with multiple people working in a place things would get moved around and it's hard for him to look for something if he doesn't know where to look.

Duvall: So you kind of divide up the household chores and he's not restricted from trying whatever...

Ice: No.

Duvall: Well, I was hoping that maybe you could talk to me about some things that you do together where you're using some of his blindness techniques or his tools. I believe you mentioned that you both belong to the same book club.

Ice: Oh, okay. Yes, we do and he reads the books on talking book and I generally get a print copy out of the library and occasionally we listen to them together but he usually speeds up the speed real fast, so that its going way faster than my ears can keep up with. And he also carries it around with him every place he goes so that if I was going to listen to the whole book with him I would be following him all over the place, so sometimes that works. Sometimes it doesn't, but at least we can discuss the same book.

Duvall: So is this book club through your local library or...

Ice: This one is through our church.

Duvall: Through your church.

Ice: But it's not a religious book club. We just read a broad variety of current fiction and non-fiction.

Duvall: So he's able to find the book through the library?

Ice: Usually. Occasionally there are books that are too new to have been recorded yet or something that just simply isn't on there in their library.

Duvall: Right. I kind of wanted to ask you about traveling. I understand that you and Jonathan enjoy planning surprise or mystery trips. Just talk a little bit about that.

Ice: That was an idea that Jonathan came up with and it's been a great deal of fun. Generally we go some place in Iowa and one of us plans a trip without telling the other one where we are going. We tell them enough, so they know what kind of clothes to bring and kind of what to expect and whether we're going to be camping or staying in a motel or things of that nature. But it really...it makes an adventure out of going to some place right in your own state that you might not otherwise think to visit. And so we've been to many different places in Iowa. We've been to Fairfield and Boone, riding the railroad there. Jon's a railroad buff. Been to Burlington, been to the Effigy Mounds, Lake Okoboji, Algona; a myriad of places primarily in Iowa. And he's an avid cartographer; loves maps. So he loves studying the map and planning out these trips and trying to throw me off the scent. So, one notable trip was the one to Algona where my knowledge of Iowa geography was such that I knew I

was some place west of Clear Lake, Mason City, but wasn't sure what was out there. And I knew we hadn't gone far enough to be at Lake Okoboji or anything like that. And so he routed me around on county roads so that you don't see any signs that say, so many miles to whatever town. So, all of a sudden here I am going down the main street of some fairly sizeable town and not having any clue what town I'm in; looking for a bank, a post office, something that would have the name of the town, but no such luck. Anyway, it turned out to be Algona, Iowa and we had a lovely weekend there staying in a Victorian Bed and Breakfast, visiting prairies, the museum of the prisoners of war camp that was there during the Second World War and finding a variety of things to do there. So, yeah, those have been a lot of fun. We do about two a year.

Duvall: Well, I have wondered how blind people plot out or as you talked about cartography, how they plan their route and know the names of the roads and the highways and things. Does he use Google on the computer or does he have one of those...not PDS...

Ice: GPS?

Duvall: GPS, yes.

Ice: No, Jonathan has GPS in his head.

Duvall: I see!

Ice: I have never known anybody like that. He has been to some place once, he remembers the street grid. I think it's

from his childhood. He had to memorize streets, because he couldn't see the signs and his parents tell about him walking the neighborhoods or driving...wanting his parents to drive him to neighborhoods and tell him what the streets were, so that he could construct a map in his head.

Duvall: I see!

Ice: And he drew maps, imaginary maps and real maps when he was a kid. And so he has a very excellent sense of direction in everything except shopping centers. (Laughter) He hates to shop and he will get lost in shopping centers, because he doesn't want to be there. (Laughter)

Duvall: Well, that just leads right into my next question. Have you ever lost your husband when you have been out like you say, walking through shopping centers or out at some big state fair grounds or somewhere where there's just masses of people?

Ice: Not that I can recall actually losing him, but of having some close calls and so it became very evident to me early on that if we were in a large group of people where it always wasn't convenient to walk side by side and one of us has to go ahead of the other. If I went ahead of him...He's interested in everything that's happening around him. He could easily get distracted and then look back and try to find me and follow somebody who was also wearing a red coat or whatever, but it wouldn't be my red coat. And so I discovered what would work best would be if I followed him, and so that's what we do when we're in a situation where we can't walk side by side or we're just in a large group of

people; I follow him and then I keep track of where he is. It works. (Laughter)

Duvall: Right. Well, that's kind of the end of any of the prepared questions that I have for you. Are there any points or issues or stories that you want to make sure are included in your oral history; anything that you want to add?

Ice: I can't think of anything off hand.

Duvall: Alright, well, I certainly want to thank you for giving up your Saturday to come and do this and we will send you, probably an electronic copy of the transcript once it has been typed up. I have a post-interview release form that I need to have you sign. Do you have any questions that I can answer, relating to the project or any chance that you would have to review your materials or anything like that?

Ice: No, I don't believe so.

Duvall: Well, then this ends the interview. Thank you very much.

39:53

(End of Recording)

Beverly Tietz

2-4-2011

